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ABSTRACT

On the basis of research reports, a survey of secondary school principals, a public opinion survey, state comparisons, public hearing testimony, and findings from high school visitations, the Michigan Commission on High Schools developed recommendations for improving seven aspects of secondary education in Michigan. First, the commission recommends extensive strengthening of state and local requirements for graduation and proposes methods for revising policies to support such requirements. Second, more stringent admission requirements for universities and four-year colleges are urged. Strengthening teacher training, certification standards, and professional development programs is the commission's third focus of concern. Fourth, the commission suggests policies that will increase and improve learning time available to students. Fifth, a recognition program to reward excellence is encouraged. The commission recommends that districts join together to offer courses otherwise impractical to provide. Finally, the commission suggests actions that should be taken to develop processes that will continually renew improvement efforts locally and at the state level. Notes provide data supporting the recommendations. (PGD)

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MICHIGAN COMMISSION ON HIGH SCHOOLS

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE:
STRENGTHENING SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MICHIGAN

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Co-sponsored by:

Michigan State Board of Education

and

Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals

December, 1983

EA 017 803

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MICHIGAN COMMISSION ON HIGH SCHOOLS

PREFACE

The Michigan Commission on High Schools was established by the State Board of Education and the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals to promote excellence in high schools and to make recommendations to the State Board of Education regarding the future of Michigan's seven hundred secondary schools.

Information for Commission discussion was gathered from numerous sources. Various educational leaders and researchers presented papers at Commission meetings. With the cooperation of principals, a survey was conducted to learn more about the conditions of high schools in Michigan. A review was made of the results of a Michigan public opinion survey regarding the report of the National Commission on Excellence —"A Nation At Risk"— and of the data comparing Michigan schools and students to others around the nation. All of this was done to provide a thorough, objective, and comprehensive report and set of recommendations.

The Commission chose to accomplish its task by submitting a preliminary set of recommendations for public discussion at a series of public hearings held throughout the state during September and October of 1983. A substantial number of teachers, administrators, and citizens expressed their views regarding the preliminary report. In addition, Commission members visited twenty-eight high schools throughout Michigan to see and talk to students and staff. Based on these experiences, modifications were made to the preliminary report, culminating in this report, "Striving for Excellence: Strengthening Secondary Education in Michigan."

In submitting the final report of the Michigan Commission on High Schools to the State Board of Education, there is a sense of great optimism. During the past year, education has become a major agenda item in the nation. The action taken on this report by the State Board of Education will touch off a chain reaction by other groups. We look forward to the adoption of the recommendations by the State Board of Education, and pledge our assistance as we all strive for excellence in our schools.

The issue of finance frequently arose during the Commission's deliberations. Because it was not a part of the Commission's charge, no recommendations regarding school finance are made. However, the State Board of Education is urged to address this issue in cooperation with the Governor and Legislature.

I want to express my appreciation to the State Board of Education, the Michigan Association of Secondary School Principals, members of the Michigan Commission on High Schools, and the staff of the Michigan Department of Education who have supported and helped the Commission.

On behalf of the Commission, I urge government officials, educators, business and labor leaders, and the public to review and take action to strengthen all education in Michigan. While the members of the Commission believe the recommendations contained in this report will serve to strengthen our educational system, we realize there will be other ideas and approaches. The origin of the ideas that are implemented is not important. What is important—indeed critical—is that the ideas be turned into action.

William J. Pappas, Chair

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MICHIGAN COMMISSION ON HIGH SCHOOLS

STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE: STRENGTHENING SECONDARY EDUCATION IN MICHIGAN

The Michigan Commission on High Schools believes that underlying the extensive interest in strengthening high schools is the ideal that no student should be denied a full educational foundation.

> "We must demand the best effort and performance from all students, whether they are gifted or less able, affluent or disadvantaged, whether destined for college, the farm, or industry. (We believe) that everyone can learn, that everyone is born with an urge to learn which can be nurtured, that a solid high school education is within the reach of virtually all, and that life-long learning will equip people with the skills required for new careers and for citizenship." (1)

The schools of the nation have played a major and successful role in shaping the social, political, and economic well-being of our nation. But, like all institutions, improvements can always be made. And even though Michigan students are performing better than their counterparts in most other states (2), Michigan schools, parents, and students must do even better to keep pace with the rapidly changing world.

In making its recommendations, the Commission intends to be constructive, not condemning; to critique, not criticize; to build, not destroy; and to set new directions, not to preserve the status quo.

The report of the Commission is based on several themes: Standards for Learning, Postsecondary Expectations, Standards for Teaching, Increasing Learning Time, Recognizing Excellence, Effective Structures, and Ongoing

Processes. A substantial portion of the material gathered is presented in summary form in the Notes Section of this report.

STANDARDS FOR LEARNING

The sage advice, "Aim high because you more than likely will hit where you are pointing," seems appropriate. The demands of society—mostly in the area of technology—will require additional skills that students must have in order to participate fully in the economic benefits of employment. Importantly, the purpose of raising standards or expectations is not to screen, sort, or select only a few students to participate in the "rite of passage" into a full measure of society's social and economic benefits. The aim, instead, must be to provide all students, regardless of race or sex, with those necessary tools. Too many students currently are going through school without taking the courses that are fundamental to full participation.

Michigan has one state requirement for graduation—a one-semester course in civics. Forty other states have more extensive graduation requirements. Although the High School Commission is not advocating state-mandated graduation requirements, it strongly believes it is appropriate and publicly acceptable for the state to establish a set of recommended high school graduation requirements for local school district review and action. (3)

Michigan graduation requirements are set locally. As a result, there is a wide variation of practice. Most local boards of education in Michigan require 20 credits for graduation with about one-half of those being electives. (4) The Commission on High Schools, in the following sections, recommends a four-year high school course load of twenty-four credits (six credits per year for four years). Out of the twenty-four possible credits, fourteen and one-half credits would be required for all students. This would leave nine and one-half credits for electives which is ample to respond to a student's special interests

or skills. For students considering postsecondary education, the Commission recommends additional credits be required.

The Commission's recommendations place great emphasis on the need for graduation requirements in a core curriculum to strengthen the skills of all students in language arts, mathematics, and science. (5)

I. We recommend:

A. The State Board of Education should adopt the guidelines for high school graduation as listed and urge all local boards of education to implement them for grades 9 through 12 within a four-year period.

1. Four years of communication skills including reading, grammar, literature, writing, speaking, and listening. (6)
2. Two years of mathematics including at least one course covering algebraic concepts. (7)
3. Two years of science including both a biological and physical science. (8)
4. Three years of social studies, including the areas of government, history, economics, cultural and ethnic studies, and law-related studies. (9)
5. Two years in one of the following areas: (a) foreign language, (b) fine or performing arts, or (c) vocational education or practical arts.
6. One year of health and/or physical education. (10)
7. One-half year of computer education. (11)
8. Students considering going on to a four-year university or college should also complete the following:
   a. One additional year of mathematics, making a total of three years, including algebra, geometry, advanced algebra, and trigonometry.

b. One additional year of science, making a total of three years, including biology, chemistry, and physics.

c. Two years of a foreign language.

B. Local school boards should immediately review their graduation requirements and, within a four-year period, require that all high school graduates successfully complete, at a minimum, the courses outlined in the State Board of Education Guidelines.

C. Local school boards while implementing the suggested graduation requirements, must assure the opportunity for students to participate in the study, appreciation and performance of the arts; foreign language programs; and vocational courses at either the local school or a regional skill center.

D. Local school boards should develop alternative programs with a strong support service component (counselors, social workers, psychologists and attendance personnel) to address the different levels of student achievement and personal development. The support service component should include career education and a process for developing employability skills. (12)

E. Local school boards should establish competency standards covering reading and mathematics skills for promotions and graduation. (13) The standards should be widely distributed to ensure that educators, students, parents, and the community are fully aware of the standards. Tests used to measure the standards should be criterion-referenced, based upon the curriculum the students have studied. Students experiencing difficulty in meeting the competency standards should be provided special support services and alternative programs.

F. Local school boards should review their total K-12 curriculum to assure that there is continuity of student and program expectations, because high school programs are influenced by elementary and middle school programs. In addition, high school entry level skills should be emphasized to students, parents, teachers, and the community.

POSTSECONDARY EXPECTATIONS

Because higher education expectations influence high school requirements, universities and colleges should review and strengthen admission standards.

II. We recommend:

A. Universities and four-year colleges should require that incoming students demonstrate proficiency in reading, writing, mathematics, science, and foreign language for admission. (14)

B. Community colleges should remain open to all individuals.

STANDARDS FOR TEACHING

The importance of having skilled, knowledgeable, and devoted staff cannot be overstated. Any effort to achieve excellence in education will largely depend on achieving excellence in teaching. (15)

III. We recommend:

A. The Governor and Legislature should increase staff development funds within Section 97 of the School Aid Act, and recommend these funds be targeted for use in the improvement of teaching skills in English, science, mathematics, and computer technology.

B. The State Board of Education should strengthen certification standards for all professional educators.

C. Local school boards should require participation in professional development programs.

D. The Governor and Legislature should enact legislation requiring the certification of building administrators.

E. The State Board of Education should support a leadership academy to train principals, teachers, and other school personnel.

F. The Governor and Legislature should amend the certification code, requiring that high school teachers be certified in a content area as a condition of assignment.

INCREASING LEARNING TIME

It is commonly accepted that there is a relationship between the amount of time an individual spends on a task and how well the task is accomplished. Research evidence substantially supports the common sense relationship between time and quality. Importantly, it is not only the amount of time devoted to a task which is critical, but also the quality of the time. The key to high quality is having teachers and students spend more time in sucessful teaching and learning.

Students in the public schools today have far more to learn than ever before. Yet, they are enrolled in a school system which has less student-teacher contact time than existed fifteen years ago. The loss of instructional time may be substantial. (16)

The recommendations to follow are designed to increase the amount of productive learning time for students. Importantly, not any one of the actions will suffice, they must be taken in combination if they are to have the intended effect.

IV. We recommend:

A. The State Board of Education should increase the minimum instructional school year from nine hundred to one thousand hours, and assure compliance.

B. The Governor and Legislature should establish, over a four-year period, a minimum of 185 instructional days and the additional instructional days should be tied to increases in state school aid.

C. The Governor and Legislature should establish incentives to school districts that extend the instructional school year beyond the legal minimum.

D. The Governor and Legislature should amend the State School Code to limit the number of days that may be deducted from the required school year because of severe weather.

E. Local school boards should operate middle, junior, and senior high schools for at least a six-class period day. (17)

F. Local school boards should examine the use of time in the classroom and develop strategies to increase the amount of productive classroom time in which students are engaged.

G. Local school boards should develop and implement a firm and fair code of student conduct that is enforced consistently. Such a policy will increase the amount of productive time students and teachers spend in learning and teaching. The State Board of Education has developed a model for school districts to review. (18)

H. Local school boards should establish a homework policy to reinforce the learning which takes place during school hours. Homework should complement school instruction by being evaluated and returned, and should be designed to build effective study and work habits. (19)

I. Local school boards should establish attendance policies with clear incentives and sanctions to reduce the amount of student learning time lost as a result of absenteeism. Students who maintain good attendance records should be recognized.

J. The Governor and Legislature should increase the funding for the Summer Institute for Science and Arts, allowing interested students to participate in enrichment programs.

RECOGNIZING EXCELLENCE

So much attention is being placed on the problems, too little attention is being placed on the successes. With so much public discussion on "what is bad", there is not enough discussion on "what is good." As a result, we do not accurately know either our strengths or our weaknesses. To bring a balance, to more accurately describe the situation, and to build confidence, it is imperative that greater effort be made to recognize excellence when and where is exists.

V. We recommend:

A. The State Board of Education should encourage excellence by developing criteria for recognizing exemplary high schools and high school programs.

B. Local school boards should encourage excellence by recognizing exemplary programs, staff, and students.

EFFICIENT STRUCTURE

The previous patterns of school organization have served us well. But with changes in technology, increases in the amount and kinds of knowledge required to be mastered, and with the continued prospect of declining enrollments, especially at the high school level, it is important that the organizational structures be the most efficient and effective to respond to the future.

VI. We recommend:

A. Intermediate school districts, large local school districts, or a consortia of small school districts should offer or coordinate advanced high school courses which individual local districts could not provide on their own. (20)

ONGOING PROCESSES

Change is a never ending process. It is important to put into place some processes which will assure that continual progress is made over longer periods of time.

VII. We recommend:

A. Local school boards should establish a district-wide School Excellence Committee of students, staff, and citizens, to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the school program, and to systematically plan and recommend changes designed to enhance the learning of students. (21)

B. The State Board of Education should initiate a process to critique textbooks and other tools of learning to assure more rigorous content and non-discriminatory treatment of groups. Those textbooks and materials which meet a high standard will be recommended, although not mandated, for use by local school districts. (22)

C. The State Board of Education should encourage a partnership between the schools, business, and labor in order to develop realistic programs to improve student skills and attitudes for the world of work.

* * *

The Commission is calling on many different entities to take actions in response to this report: The Governor, The Legislature, The State Board of Education, local boards of education, and higher education institutions. While each of these entities has its own unique authority and responsibility to establish policies for education, their actions will gain greater support if developed in concert with one another.

Similarly, many of these actions will have full impact if they are supported by the nongovernmental groups which can play key roles, including the students, the professional education associations, and business, labor, and industry leaders and organizations. Participation from all sectors is vital if the recommended actions are to be realized into practical programs which will serve all types of students.

While all the recommendations are important and, ideally, should be done immediately and together, some transitions will be necessary. And, even before official action is taken by the State Board of Education or local boards of education, students and their parents may assume the responsibility for meeting the guidelines for high school graduation. For those recommendations requiring a change of priority or increase in funds, the Commission therefore suggeststhat the goal be established immediately and some effort be made each year until the goal is achieved. It will take some time, but the time to start is now.

NOTES

1. From the National Commission on Excellence Report, "A Nation at Risk."

2. On the American College Testing program (ACT), Michigan students consistently score better than the national average on three of the four subtests: mathematics, social studies and natural science. Only on the English subtest do Michigan students fall slightly below the national average. Similarly, college-bound juniors in Michigan consistently score above the national average in the mathematics subtest and slightly below the national average in the verbal subtest for Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test/National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/NMSQT). On the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery (ASVAB), Michigan students' averages exceed the national averages on all 13 tests. On the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), Michigan students score more than 30 points above the national average on both verbal and mathematics subtests.

The Michigan Educational Assessment Program tests reading and mathematics skills of fourth, seventh and tenth graders each year. Three out of four students who took the 1982-83 state assessment tests received acceptable scores in reading and two out of three received passing scores in mathematics. It was the second consecutive year that state-wide mathematics and reading scores improved at all levels, although the State Board of Education concluded the seventh and tenth grade mathematics scores were lower than they should be.

3. About 70% of the high school principals, 91% of the public, and 83% of the teachers surveyed thought that the State of Michigan should recommend high school graduation requirements to local boards of education.

4. The National Commission on Excellence concluded that, "given the freedom to choose the substance of half or more of their education, many students opt for less demanding personal service courses, such as bachelor living." Seventy percent of the Michigan principals agreed with this observation.

5. According to the survey of high schools, mathematics course enrollments, by sex, are as follows: algebra—50% male, 50% female; geometry—57% male, 43% female; advanced algebra—51% male, 49% female; trigonometry—53% male, 47% female; calculus—56% male, 44% female. For science the enrollments are: biology—48% male, 52% female; chemistry—51% male, 49% female; physics—56% male, 44% female.

6. Based upon the Commission's survey of Michigan high schools, English requirements ranged as follows: (1) less than 3 years—5%, (2) 3 years—60%, (3) 3 1/2 years—10%, and (4) 4 years—25%. Of the public surveyed, 83% favored requiring four years of high school English.

7. For mathematics the present practice is: (1) less than 1 year—5%, (2) 1 year—43%, (3) 1 1/2 years—8%, (4) 2 years—41%, and (5) more than 2 years—3%. Even though only one and one-half years is required, on the average, the average student takes 2.8 years of mathematics. Ninety-two percent of the public favored requiring three years of mathematics. About

77% of the students now take algebra, 57% take geometry, 33% take advanced algebra, 17% trigonometry, and 8% calculus.

8. The practice for science is: (1) less than 1 year—5%, (2) 1 year—57%, (3) 1 1/2 years—4%, (4) 2 years—32%, and (5) more than 2 years—2%. On the average, even though the average requirement is 1.3 years, students are taking 2.2 years of science. Two-thirds of the public favored requiring three years of science. About 82% of the students now take biology, 38% take chemistry, and 18% take physics. Between 1960 and 1977 nationally, the proportion of public high school students enrolled in science dropped from 60 to 48 percent.

9. The practice for social science is: (1) less than 2 years—11%, (2) 2 years—31%, (3) 2 1/2 years—14%, (4) 3 years—34%, and (5) more than 3 years—10%. Two-thirds of the public favored requiring three years of social studies.

10. The practice for physical education is: (1) less than 1 year—21%, (2) 1 year—57%, (3) more than 1 year—22%.

11. Only a handful of districts have a requirement for computer science or literacy, and 86% of the public and 67% of teachers favored requiring a half year of computer science. About 28% of high school students take a course in computer science/literacy.

12. See: "Core Components of the Employability Development Plan (EDP)," Michigan State Board of Education, May 1983.

13. Over 97% of the public surveyed favored requiring students to pass competency examinations in mathematics and reading to graduate from high school. Seventy-seven percent of the high schools reported that they have no minimum competency testing program which students must pass to move to another grade or to graduate.

14. Fifty-four percent of the principals said the colleges and universities should raise their entrance requirements, and 81% of the public said it was "very serious" or "somewhat serious" that entrance requirements to college have been declining in recent years.

15. According to the National Commission on Excellence, one-half of the newly employed mathematics, science and English teachers are not qualified to teach these subjects; fewer than one-third of the U.S. high schools offer physics taught by qualified teachers. In contrast, only 20% of the Michigan principals agreed with this statement. Because of declining enrollments, some teachers are being assigned to new areas requiring an updating of skills and knowledge. Regarding the public's opinion, 87% favor requiring teachers to meet higher standards and 97% favored requiring that teachers prove competency in their fields.

16. A study of the school week, as cited in the Commission on Excellence Report, found that some schools provide students only 17 hours of academic instruction during the week, and the average school provides about 22. Forty-three percent of the Michigan principals agreed with this observation. According to the National Commission on Excellence, "In industrialized

countries, it is not unusual for academic high schools students to spend 8 hours a day at school, 220 days per year. In the United States, by contrast, the typical school day is 6 hours and the school year is 180 days." In Michigan, the average school day also is 6 hours and the minimum required school year is 180 days. In response to this idea, 51% of the Michigan public opposed lengthening the school year to 200 days.

17. Sixty-one percent of the high schools reported they have six class periods a day; 23% have seven periods; and 14% have five periods. Fifty-five percent of the public favored a seven-hour day.

18. "A Recommended Guide to Student Rights and Responsibilities in Michigan," Michigan State Board of Education, May, 1982.

19. According to the National Commission on Excellence, "The amount of homework for high school seniors has decreased and grades have risen as average student achievement has been declining." Fifty-two percent of the Michigan principals agreed with this statement while 44% disagreed. According to the principals, 74% of our high schools have no formal homework policy. Sixty-nine percent of the public surveyed favor an increase in the amount of homework at the high school level. Although students who report doing the most homework score highest on national assessment tests, and those who report watching television and doing little homework score lower, explicit homework requirements and policies are a rarity in most of the nations school systems.

20. Currently, some local school districts do not offer what is considered a full range of courses in mathematics and science. For example, 4% of the schools do not offer advanced algebra, 23% do not offer trigonometry, and 41% do not offer calculus. In science, 4% do not offer chemistry and 8% do not offer physics.

21. Of the high schools surveyed, only 60% reported having a regular procedure to review curriculum.

22. A study cited by the National Commission on Excellence revealed that a majority of students were able to master 80% of the materials in some of their subject-matter texts before they had even opened the books. Forty-one percent of the principals agreed with this observation.

APPENDIX A

HIGH SCHOOL VISITATIONS

Muskegon-Mona Shores High School
Okemos High School
Sturgis High School
Roscommon High School
Grand Rapids-Northview High School
Frankenmuth High School
East Kentwood High School
Lapeer-East High School
St. Louis High School
Albion High School
St. Joseph High School
Ann Arbor-Huron High School
Lansing-Eastern High School
Mason High School
Reed City High School
Detroit-Central High School
Bloomfield Hills-Lahser High School
Utica-Stevenson High School
Ferndale High School
Detroit-Northern High School
Flint-Southwestern High School
Grosse Pointe-South High School
Jackson High School
Southfield-Lathrup High School
St. Ignace-La Salle High School
Sault Ste. Marie-Sault High School

APPENDIX B

PRESENTATIONS TO COMMISSION

Wilbur Brookover, Michigan State University, "School Climate"

B. Frank Brown, "Florida Commission on High Schools"

David Donovan, Department of Education, "Michigan Education Assessment Program"

Ronald Edmonds, Michigan State University, "Effective Schools"

Stanley Hecker, Michigan State University, "Declining Enrollments and School Finance"

Kent Leach, Bureau of School Services, University of Michigan, "School Accreditation"

Jack Minzey, Eastern Michigan University, "Time on Task"

Edward Roeber, Department of Education, "Michigan Education Assessment Program"

Frank Womer, University of Michigan, "External Testing"

APPENDIX C

COMMISSION HEARING DATES

September 26, 1983	Northern Michigan University
October 6, 1983	Grand Rapids Junior College
October 13, 1983	Law Building Auditorium, Lansing
October 19, 1983	Detroit City/County Building
October 25, 1983	Gaylord Holiday Inn

APPEXDIX D

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A Study of High Schools. National Association of Secondary School Principals and National Association of Independent Schools, Toeodore Sizer, Project Director.

A Place Called School. Study of Schooling, John I. Goodlad, Director.

Making the Grade. Twentieth Century Fund Task Force on Federal Elementary and Secondary Education Policy, Robert Wood, Chairman.